



South African Family Practice goes online www.safpj.co.za

This issue of South African Family Practice (SAFP) marks the beginning of a new era for our journal. SAFP is joining the ranks of online publications with the formal launch of its website www.safpj.co.za. SAFP will continue to be a print publication in the traditional sense, but with an important difference – the print and online versions of the publication will be complimentary and will not be exactly the same. The most important difference between the two versions is that the research articles will be published fully online, but only their abstracts will be published in print. The print reference will remain the official reference of the published article. This change occurs without affecting the subsidy status of SAFP with the Department of Education.

This policy change was introduced for two main reasons: Firstly we would like to shorten the waiting period for publication once a manuscript has been accepted as we can now publish more than the usual two or three research articles per issue. At the moment manuscripts takes about 12 months to be published once accepted. This delay is unacceptable. Secondly, by publishing only the abstract in print, 6-8 pages in print are saved per article, dramatically reducing the cost of printing, but also making more space available for continuing medical education (CME) articles, which is the main attraction of SAFP for the average reader. As a result of this change, authors will now be allowed up to 600 words for the abstract. Because the casual reader will read only the abstracts it is recommended that researchers add as much specific detail as possible to the abstract, within the new word count. The abstract should stimulate the reader to read the full article online.

There are several other advantages of online publication of research: Since online space is inexpensive, authors can be allowed more freedom in terms of the length of manuscripts, and they may now add additional information such as questionnaires or measuring instruments. This is in my opinion a great advantage to second language English speakers, like most authors publishing in SAFP.

Probably the most important benefit is exposure to an international readership. Local print publications such as SAFP, especially if not listed in the major indexing databases such as PubMed/Index Medicus, are severely restricted in terms of exposure to an international readership. It, however, works both ways, since the international research community

is also not exposed to local research published in SAFP. Through www.safpj.co.za the work of authors of SAFP become ubiquitous and part of the vast and growing public knowledge resource on the internet. Access is easy through search internet engines such as Google.

Through wider exposure to the international researcher community SAFP hopes to attract more African authors and authors from the rest of the world, to become a truly African and international publication furthering scholarly research in family medicine, primary health care and rural health in our continent.

SAFP also wishes to support the open access movement in scientific publication. It is about being able to find and read research and scholarship online at no additional cost. Most research are paid for by taxpayers worldwide and we believe taxpayers should reap the benefit of their investment. Journals such as SAFP add value to research through peer review and publication and a business model will have to be found to compensate the publisher for this added value. SAFP will be free until further notice, but access to articles will require the completion of a simple online registration process. Follow the "Registration" link on the homepage when accessing the journal for the first time.

www.safpj.co.za is however much more than online publishing of the SAFP journal, it is also a complete online manuscript management system. Authors can submit their manuscripts online and the total peer review, editing and publication process takes place online. The main benefit to authors is to be able to track the progress of their submitted manuscripts. For the editors and editorial staff the main benefit is a much improved tracking, management and communication system. The net result should be a better service to authors and reviewers, and a faster turn around time for manuscripts.

I hope the readers and authors of www.safpj.co.za will enjoy the website. In time we will improve the functionality, but the most important thing has already happened, South African Family Practice is available 24/7 to anyone with an internet connection anywhere in the world.

Pierre de Villiers
Editor-in-Chief